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## Enjoy Shortbread and Egnog This Holiday Season and *Improve Your Health*

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

### 1. No bad foods, just bad diets

Don't be a scrooge and nitpick your favorite holiday treats and make family and friends that are celebrating traditional foods feel badly. It's not what you do between Christmas and New Year's, but what you do between New Year's and Christmas that really counts. Health should be measured by your ability to not only eat healthfully but also soulfully with fun and flexibility.

Also be mindful that overeating occasionally will never result in permanent lasting weight changes. The goal over the holidays is to be mindful but not obsessive.



Instead choose to work around “non-negotiable” foods (those that are your favorites or are unique to a social gathering). Be choosy and go for what you really love. Give up others that are eaten mindlessly or are just simply chosen for convenience or offered at the holidays and you really don't appreciate them. When you are eating a delightful food, savor every bite guilt-free. When you eat this way less always becomes more.

Many of my clients think about the holidays and start creating a mental list of “foods to avoid” or “foods that are bad.” Instead make your list positive. Think about which of the rich and decadent holiday foods and meals would make it to the top of the list for “yummiest holiday foods” list. There is a distinct level of satisfaction when you allow yourself to indulge and truly enjoy every bite of your favorite holiday foods.

At the top of my list you will find my mom's homemade shortbread cookies, gingerbread men and of course chocolate (after all I am the chocoholic nutritionist). I will likely enjoy rum and eggnog and since it will likely be once or twice over the holidays, the fact that it has over 300 calories per cup doesn't matter.

### 2. Is it really as bad as you think?

The first thing to consider is how big of a challenge the holiday season will be for you. Over the years, I've met many people who are stressed about “blowing their diet” over the holidays when it really wasn't that big of a deal. I've also met clients that don't expect the holidays will be challenging but find themselves overeating and overindulging for over a month of the holiday season.

To assess this take a calendar and “X” off the days you are likely to overeat or enjoy special holiday treats.

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For example, you may start by placing an "X" on Dec. 24, 25 and 26, as well as New Year's Eve, New Year's Day and days with any holiday parties you know you will be attending. For many people, there isn't a huge list of X's on their calendar. For others even listing the number of holiday functions and parties you will be attending may result in a calendar full of X's. If this is the case try to make healthier choices on other days in the month that do not have an "X" placed beside it. Go back to your "yummiest holiday foods" list and be choosy. This type of planning allows you the freedom to enjoy the holidays but not overdo it.

### 3. Think about what you drink

Drink plenty of water and tea throughout the holidays. When you are dehydrated it may trigger you to overeat since often your body gets signals of thirst mixed up with hunger. Alcoholic beverages can also add up to be many "empty calories" [high in calories with low nutritional value]. Between drinks containing alcohol, try a low-calorie beverage such as sparkling mineral water or club soda with a splash of cranberry juice.

### 4. Finding balance at holiday parties

Before going out to a party, have a nutritious nibble or small snack so you don't arrive ravenous. Try some toast and peanut butter, or yogurt and banana. Think about your "yummiest holiday foods list" and give yourself permission to enjoy the best the party has to offer. When you are at the party, distance yourself from the food table and remember to mingle more than you munch. Using small plates and bowls helps to "fill up our eyes" since studies show the bigger the plate/bowl the more we will eat.

### 5. Squeeze in some fitness

As tough as it is, don't neglect your fitness over the holidays. Get out and do plenty of walking if you simply can't adhere to your normal routine. Try exercising first thing in the morning, since often as the day progresses it becomes harder to squeeze it in. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. When shopping, park far from the store entrances and walk an extra few laps around the mall when finished. Encourage some family traditions that are not food related. Try tobogganing, skating, snowman building and walks to look at the Christmas lights.

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